

PLATE LXV.

SPIRAL, DIAGONAL, ZOOMORPHIC, AND LATER ANGLO-SAXON ORNAMENTS.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initial Letter, from the Gospels of Lindisfarne. End of 7th century. British Museum. (Magnified.) 2. Ornament of Angulated Lines, from the Gregorian Gospels, British Museum. (Magnified.) 3. Interlaced Animals, from the Book of Kells, in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. (Magnified.) 4. Diagonal Pattern. Gospels of Mac Durnan, in the Library of Lambeth Palace. 9th century. (Magnified.) 5 and 12. Spiral Patterns, from Gospels of Lindisfarne. (Magnified.) 6. Diagonal Patterns, from Irish MS. at St. Gall. 9th century. (Magnified.) 7. Interlaced Ornament, from ditto. 8. Interlaced Animals. Gospels of Mac Durnan. (Magnified.) 9, 10, 13. Diagonal Patterns. Gospels of Mac Durnan. (Magnified.) 11. Diagonal Patterns, from Gospels of Lindisfarne. (Magnified.) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Terminal Border of Interlaced Animals, from Gospels of Lindisfarne. (Magnified.) 15 and 17. Panels of interlaced Beasts and Birds, from Irish Gospels at St. Gall. 8th or 9th century. 16. Initial Q, formed of an elongated Angulated Animal, from Psalter of Ricemarchus, Trinity College, Dublin. End of 11th century. 18. One Quarter of Frame, or Border, of an illuminated Page of the Benedictional of Æthelgar at Rouen. 10th century.—SILVESTRE. 19. Ditto, from the Arundel Psalter, No. 155, British Museum.—HUMPHRIES. 20. Ditto, from the Gospels of Canute, in British Museum. End of 10th century. 21. Ditto, from the Benedictional of Æthelgar. 22. Terminal Ornament of spiral Pattern, with Birds. Part of large Initial Letter in the Gospels of Lindisfarne. (Real size.)—HUMPHRIES. |
|--|--|

CELTIC ORNAMENT.

THE genius of the inhabitants of the British Islands has, in all ages, been indicated by productions of a class or style singularly at variance with those of the rest of the world. Peculiar as are our characteristics at the present time, those of our forefathers, from the remotest ages, have been equally so. In the Fine Arts, our immense Druidical temples are still the wonder of the beholder; and in succeeding ages gigantic stone crosses, sometimes thirty feet high, most elaborately carved and ornamented with devices of a style unlike those of other nations, exhibited the old genius for lapidary erections under a modified form inspired by a new faith.

The earliest monuments and relics of ornamental art which we possess (and they are far more numerous than the generality of persons would conceive,) are so intimately connected with the early introduction of Christianity into these islands,* that we are compelled to refer to the latter in our endeavours to unravel the history and peculiarities of Celtic Art; a task which has hitherto been scarcely attempted to be performed, although possessing, from its extreme nationality, a degree of interest equal, one would have thought, to that connected with the history of ornamental art in other countries.

1. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE.—Without attempting to reconcile the various statements which have been made by historians as to the precise manner of the introduction of religion into Britain, we have the most ample evidence, not only that it had been long established previous to the arrival of

* The Pagan Celtic remains at Gavr' Innis, in Brittany, New Grange, in Ireland, and I believe one Druidical monument near Harlech, in Wales, exhibit a very rude attempt at ornamentation, chiefly consisting of incised spiral or circular and angulated lines.

St. Augustine in A.D. 596, but that in several important points of doctrine the old British religionists differed from the missionary sent by St. Gregory the Great. This statement is most completely borne out by still existing artistic evidences. St. Gregory sent into England various copies of the Holy Scriptures, and two of these are still preserved; one in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and the other in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. They are copies of the Holy Gospels, written in Italy, in the large uncial or rounded characters common in that country, and destitute of ornament; the initial letter of each Gospel scarcely differing from the ordinary writing of the text, the first line or two being merely written in red ink, each Gospel preceded by a portrait of the Evangelist (one only still remains, namely, that of St. Luke), seated under a round-headed arch, supported upon marble columns, and ornamented with foliage arranged in a classical manner. All the most ancient Italian manuscripts are entirely destitute of ornamental elaboration.

The case is totally different with the most ancient manuscripts known to have been written in these islands; and as these are the chief supports of our theory of the independent origin of Celtic ornament, and as, moreover, we are constantly opposed by doubts as to the great age which has been assigned to these precious documents, we must enter into a little palæographical detail in proof of their venerable antiquity. It is true, indeed, that none of them are dated; but in some the scribe has inserted his name, which the early annals have enabled us to identify, and thus to fix the period of the execution of the volume. In this manner the autograph Gospels of St. Columba; the Leabhar Dhimma, or Gospels of St. Dimma Mac Nathi; the Bodleian Gospels, written by Mac Regol; and the Book of Armagh, have been satisfactorily assigned to periods not later than the ninth century. Another equally satisfactory evidence exists, in proof of the early date of the volumes, in the unrivalled collection of contemporary Anglo-Saxon Charters existing in the British Museum and other libraries, from the latter half of the seventh century up to the Norman Conquest; and although, as Astle observes, "these Charters are generally written in a more free and expeditious manner than the books written in the same ages, yet a similarity of character is observable between Charters and books written in the same century, and they authenticate each other." Now it is quite impossible to compare, for example, the Cottonian MS. Vespasian, A 1, generally known under the name of the Psalter of St. Augustine, with the Charters of Sebbi King of the East Saxons, A.D. 670 (Casley's *Catal. of MSS.* p. xxiv.); of Lotharius King of Kent, dated at Reculver, A.D. 679; or, again, the Charter of Æthelbald, dated A.D. 769, with the Gospels of Mac Regol or St. Chad; without being perfectly convinced that the MSS. are coeval with the Charters.

A third species of evidence of the great antiquity of our very ancient national manuscripts is afforded by the fact of many of them being still preserved in various places abroad, whither they were carried by the Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries. The great number of monastic establishments founded by our countrymen in different parts of Europe is matter of historical record; and we need only cite the case of St. Gall, an Irishman, whose name has not only been given to the monastic establishment which he founded, but even to the Canton of Switzerland in which it is situated. The monastic books of this establishment, now transferred to the public library, comprise many of the oldest manuscripts in Europe, and include a number of fragments of elaborately-ornamented volumes executed in these islands, and long venerated as relics of the founder. In like manner, the Book of the Gospels of St. Boniface is still preserved at Fulda with religious care; and that of St. Kilian (an Irishman), the Apostle of Franconia, was discovered in his tomb, stained with his blood, and is still preserved at Wurtzburg, where it is annually exhibited on the altar of the cathedral on the anniversary of his martyrdom.

Now all these manuscripts, thus proved to have been written in these islands at a period prior to the end of the ninth century, exhibit peculiarities of ornamentation totally at variance with those